



# HR Highlights

April 1, 2001

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**D**ear Colleagues:

Welcome to April HR Highlights!

Spring is upon us in Washington, D.C., with the nation's cherry blossoms in full bloom. Spring is a great time of year to reflect on past accomplishments and future initiatives. We have recently forwarded the Office of Human Resources Management Year 2000 Report. This document was prepared with you, our customer, in mind. We've included an overview of our new organization, office by office, reviewed our accomplishments, outlined our initiatives for 2001 and included a phone directory of our personnel. We hope you find this document useful.

Included in the current edition of *Highlights* are the latest statistics (page 2) on why VA is a federal employer of choice. One of the programs that helps in that regard is the One-VA Child Care Tuition Assistance Program. Also included in this edition are changes that affect all employees, changes to the Thrift Savings Plan (page 3). The latest information on Labor Management Partnerships can be read on page 4, information so vital to our leadership roles.

Finally, I have had several service opportunities this month, one of which is a mentoring opportunity. I will also be sharing my experiences with the current Leadership VA Class. I am grateful to be able to share with my colleagues and give back some of what I have received as an employee of the VA.

We're keeping our promises to you by discovering and eradicating obstacles to improving our service. Together, we WILL make a difference in the lives of our Nation's veterans, whom we proudly serve.

/s/

Ventris C. Gibson  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
for Human Resources Management

## Temporary Full-Time Appointments of Certain Medical Personnel

The implementation of Public Law 106-419, Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, Section 204, regarding temporary full-time appointments of certain medical personnel has two major changes. The first change allows the appointment of graduate Physician Assistants (38 U.S.C. 7405 (c)) for up to two years pending certification, for which the previous authority only allowed up to one year. The second change effects the temporary appointment of full-time medical support personnel (38 U.S.C. 7405 (c)) who could only be appointed for one-year, formerly a non-renewable appointment. This change will permit temporary full-time appointments of medical support personnel for up to three years, that may be renewed for additional periods, not to exceed three years for each additional period. Currently, these authorities are in the approval stage. Once approved, these notices will be published in the Office of Human Resources Management website under the topic of "News, Updates, and Events".

**For additional service, call  
Chuck McClellan, 202-273-8262**

## The Latest VA Statistics

About 222,000 people – 13 percent of the federal work force – are employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Their skills range from doctors and nurses, personnel specialists and payroll workers, to cemetery maintenance specialists and experts in rating disabilities.

VA employees are found in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and other U.S. territories, plus the Philippine Islands (running a large medical clinic) and South Korea (overseeing a military discharge facility). They are the health-care professionals in 172 VA medical centers and more than 600 clinics, the counselors in 206 vet centers, the specialists in evaluating disabilities found in 57 regional centers and 24 military discharge centers, and the cemetery workers at 119 national cemeteries.

VA operates one of the largest health care systems in the United States. VA employs over 13,000 physicians and 48,500 registered nurses, practical nurses, and licensed practical nurses, all highly trained and dedicated to providing top quality health care to veterans and their families. Ensuring that veterans and their dependents receive accurate and timely financial payments, VA employs approximately 3,700 claims examiners and 500 loan specialists. VA's cemetery system staff consists of more than 1,200 employees committed to maintaining VA's veterans cemeteries as national shrines.

VA is an employer of choice for women, minority members and disabled people. It values the cultural diversity that allows employees to perform their best and provides the opportunities for them to advance as far as their talents will take them. The 121,435 women employed by VA comprise 57 percent of VA's workforce. The 78,170 African Americans, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaskans represent 37 percent of VA's workforce. Veterans total 58,276, of whom 8,139 are women veterans and 15,303 are veterans with disabilities.

**Statistics were compiled by VA Public Affairs Office**

## Thrift Savings Plan

Beginning May 1, 2001, the TSP Program will include two new Funds in which employees may invest. The Funds are the Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund and the International Stock Index Investment (I) Fund. More detailed information about this change in the TSP Program will become available soon. As a reminder, the TSP Open Season will begin on May 15, 2001 and continue through July 31, 2001. During the Open Season, FERS employees will be able to contribute up to 11% of the basic pay they earn each pay period and CSRS employees will be able to contribute up to 6% of the basic pay they earn each pay period.

**For additional service, contact  
Larry Staley, 202-565-8093**

## OPM Plans Classification Studies

The Classification Policy Staff in OHRM hosted a meeting recently featuring OPM standards writer, Ruby Washington, a former VA employee. Ms. Washington is leading a classification study that will review 49 occupations in four job categories and will include over 50,000 positions in VA alone. Positions include Diagnostic Radiologic Technologist, Pharmacy Technician and many others. According to Ms. Washington, fact finding may begin as early as June 2001, with draft standards coming out as early as January 2002.

**For additional service, contact  
Bill Ellison, 202-273-9841**

## One VA Child Care Tuition Assistance Program

Employees continue to apply for program subsidies. The most recent statistics indicate that over 670 employees have been approved for the program and 892 of their eligible children are enrolled. The Program Administrator, FEEA, also reports: 72 applications are pending and 23 have been denied. The One VA Child Care Tuition Assistance Program website continues to be visited with over 4,550 hits to date.



A work group, consisting of One VA Child Care Tuition Assistance Program Implementation Committee members, has been formed to design a measurement tool for assessment and analysis of the program. A questionnaire will be sent to HR offices within the next two weeks to find out how employees obtain information about the One VA Child Care Tuition Assistance Pilot Program and the types of promotional efforts used locally to market the program.

**For additional service, contact  
Linda Settle, 202-273-9838**

## Ventris Gibson Mentors!

Carolyn Hunt, Director, Lincoln Nebraska VA Regional Office has come to VA Central Office to be mentored by Ventris Gibson. Carolyn's career in VA spans many years, most of which have been spent in VBA, and nearly all of that doing Compensation and Pension Service work. Leadership assessments (taken while in the orientation program for the SES Candidate Development Program) indicated a need for development in HRM. She arranged for a one month "Developmental Assignment" which included shadowing Ms. Gibson. Also in the works is a potential detail with other VA executives. Ms Hunt says she hopes to gain a better understanding of the HRM process as well as an appreciation of the process from a headquarters perspective.

# Labor Management Partnerships

***(This excerpt was taken from the most recent OHRM Monthly Conference Call.)***

On February 17, 2001 President Bush signed Executive Order 13203, entitled Revocation of Executive Order and Presidential Memorandum Concerning Labor-Management Partnerships. This was followed by a March 1, 2001, OPM Memorandum to Agency Heads, discussing the affect of the Executive Order on labor-management partnerships.

The Office of Labor-Management Relations and the Office of General Counsel are completing an analysis of what VA is required to do as a result of this Order. Until VA has released an official position we ask that you continue to honor your partnership arrangements to include continuing to bargain in permissive areas.

The Executive Order has dissolved the Federal-wide National Partnership Council. In addition, it directs Agency Heads to rescind any orders, rules, regulations, guidelines, or policies, which were used to implement or enforce the Executive Order, which required the establishment of labor management councils.

The Order however makes it clear that VA's existing collective bargaining agreements remain in full force and effect. Most of our agreements contain partnership articles and commitments for VA to bargain in permissive areas. At the same time permissive bargaining is conditioned on the premise that EO 12871 remains in effect. Since it has been revoked, VA needs to decide whether it wants to continue this requirement. If it decides not to, then either party can reopen that part of the agreement.

OPM's Memorandum additionally makes it clear that the EO does not prescribe any particular approach to labor-management relations. Agencies have discretion to adopt a labor relations strategy best suited to their own needs.

When the analysis is complete, we will be presenting VA leadership with a set of suggested actions and policy considerations, particularly in the area of permissive bargaining.

**For additional service, call  
Ron Cowles, 202-273-5369**

## Upcoming Changes to Title 38 Personnel Records and Files

Upon approval, this issuance will establish VHA procedures concerning the establishment, maintenance, and disposition of Title 38 personnel records and files. The Handbook will identify the purpose or required Title 38 personnel records and files as well as the individuals covered by each record or file. The issues also outline procedures concerning safeguarding, accessing to, or amending Title 38 records and files. It also contains guidance on documenting and reporting disclosures as required by the Privacy Act (5 USC 552a).

Once these documents are approved, they will

be posted on the Office of Human Resources Management and VHA Directives web sites.

**For additional service, contact**

Join the **OHRM Conference Call** – Wednesday, April 11th at 3 PM. Call-in number is 1-800-767-1750.

**For additional service, contact  
Ken Quantock, 202-273-9753.**